REVIEW

Lizanne Henderson. *Witchcraft and Folk Belief in the Age of Enlightenment: Scotland, 1670-1740*. Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016. Pp. 382. ISBN: 978-1-403-99566-7 (HB); ISBN: 978-1-403-99567-4 (PB); ISBN: 978-1-137-31324-9 (EB). €94.99 / €79.99.

Eighteenth-century Scotland is celebrated as a land of the intellect, of rationalism. It was also famed as a northerly place of superstition and dark arts. While many historians focus on either the Enlightenment or the witch hunts, Henderson places witch beliefs within elite intellectual debate. She also places them within the popular culture of everyday charming, cursing, healing and shapeshifting. (pps.107-121). In the decades after the last full-scale witch hunt in Scotland, far from being the preserve of dolted old ladies in run-down cottages, witchcraft remained central to the worldview of ministers, judges, philosophers and, indeed, kings. Henderson is less concerned with what witches may or may not have done, and more with beliefs about witches, providing a fascinating impression of Scottish 'mindscapes'.

Henderson's first two chapters provide effective historiographical, terminological, methodological, intellectual, and European context. Here she introduces critical questions of gender. Throughout Henderson keeps a sharp eye on this, going far beyond reviewing how and why witch-hunts were predominantly focused on women, and instead elucidating how folk belief, charming, healing and diabolism were gendered. Subsequent chapters take on topics including hunting witches, the role of the Devil, debates around witchcraft, and the

persistence of witch belief. The only exception is chapter seven which is an engaging case study, dedicated to highlighting these topics in the south west. While the article version of the chapter in the *Scottish Historical Review* worked well, the chapter would have benefited from being shortened rather than lengthened, perhaps through including social and economic background material earlier in the book and culling the repeated examples.

Unlike many Scottish surveys, Henderson's book takes the North seriously. She draws on many cases from the Gaelic-speaking half of the country, from Argyll through Perthshire to Sutherland, while not neglecting the Northern Isles and Caithness. Thankfully, her consideration of region goes beyond a Highland/Lowland dichotomy. Henderson argues that it was the border areas of the Highlands which were most affected by witch prosecutions, and that Lowland cases tended to be in coastal communities and those closer to judicial centres. (pps.225-7) A particularly interesting and effective section is her assessment of a spate of accusations across Ross, Sutherland and Caithness in the early eighteenth-century. (pps.224-240)

The relationship between church and witchcraft is a recurring topic. Henderson teases out a far more nuanced and changeable relationship than might be expected. Those who have read *Scottish Fairy Belief*, co-authored with Ted Cowan, will be familiar with the idea that treatises arguing for the existence of the magical Otherworld were written by ministers, notably Robert Kirk, as a defence of religion in the face of increasingly open challenges from atheistic writers. Henderson shows how debates about witchcraft were central to the fundamental philosophical question of whether there is more in this world than that which is visible. Through the actions or inactions of ministers the church, alongside the judicial system, also played

a practical role in determining whether witch cases were prosecuted or quietly dropped. Often the church disciplinary system, as well as the personal influence of the minister, worked with the judiciary to keep vigilantism against suspected witches under control. Both institutions were, after all, concerned with maintaining their own social authority. (p.103) Yet at other times ministers were responsible for pursuing prosecutions or stood by with tacit approval, as in the horrific case at Pittenweem where a woman was brutally murdered. (pps.213-224)

Henderson explores the place of magic, providing insight as to how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Scots explained and faced problems such as illness, shortage, crop failures and personal disaster. She argues that most 'witches' developed their reputations over years, and that certain forms of witchcraft were clearly acceptable and useful. If such a person, however, became troublesome or if a scapegoat were required, the community might pursue the individual, using formal processes of church and state or through direct action. Incidents such as that at Pittenweem emphasise the agency of ordinary people as they sought to protect themselves by identifying, controlling or punishing those perceived as a threat.

Well supplied with photographs, illustrations, graphs, and case studies, Henderson's work is valuable and readable, despite the challenging length of some chapters. She effectively demonstrates that witchcraft, far from being a peculiar and inexplicable aberration, was a central part of Enlightenment discourse and of ordinary Scottish life. For most, witchcraft had little to do with diabolical black arts but much to do with the 'ordinary experiences of sex, childbirth, disability and death ... agriculture, fishing and household economics'. (p.84)

Elizabeth Ritchie, University of the Highlands and Island